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AUTHOR Kulig, Barbara; O'Brien, Mary Lou
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an agenda for expanding interest and motivation among sixth-grade foreign language students in a middle-class suburban community located in northeastern Illinois. The problem was originally noted by the teaching staff/researchers who found students unable to focus and maintain attention during class. Administration of surveys to students and teachers confirmed the problem and its extent. Investigation of the probable cause data disclosed that the curriculum was out-dated and inappropriate. it did not address real-life situations and lacked continuity. Teaching methods were deficient in creativity, and the program did not speak to the academic needs of a heterogenous group of students. Solutions suggested by professional experts, in conjunction with an investigation of the problem setting, indicate two compatible teaching methodologies that would offer successful outcomes. The two strategies served as a basis for designing the curriculum. Student levels of interest in foreign language increased, as did their motivation. These changes appeared to be related to curricular modifications and revised teaching practices. Appendixes contain the sixth-grade schedule and four survey instruments. (Author/JL)

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INCREASING LEVELS OF INTEREST AND MOTIVATION OF SIXTH-GRADE JUNIOR HIGH FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS THROUGH CURRICULUM REDEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS

by

*Barbara Kulig and *Mary Lou O'Brien

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*Teachers
Friendship Junior High
Des Plaines, IL

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This Action Research was approved by

Priscilla Hartwig Ed. D., **SXU Facilitator**

Terry Stirling, Ph.D., **IRI/Skylight Facilitator**

Dean, School of Education

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Abstract

AUTHOR: Barb Kulig & Mary Lou O'Brien SITE: Wheeling
DATE: April, 1994

TITLE: Increasing Levels of Interest and Motivation of Sixth-Grade Junior High Foreign Language Students Through Curriculum Redevelopment and Innovative Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT: This paper describes an agenda for expanding interest and motivation among sixth grade foreign language students in a middle-class suburban community located in northeastern Illinois. The problem was originally noted by the teaching staff/researchers who found students unable to focus and maintain attention during class. Administration of surveys to students and teachers confirmed the problem and its extent.

Investigation of the probable cause data disclosed that the curriculum was out-dated and inappropriate. It did not address real-life situations and lacked continuity. Teaching methods were deficient in creativity, and the program did not speak to the academic needs of a heterogeneous group of students.

Solution methods suggested by the professional experts, in conjunction with an investigation of the problem setting, indicate two compatible teaching methodologies that would offer successful outcomes. These two strategies served as a basis for designing the curriculum.

Student levels of interest in foreign language increased, as did their motivation. These changes appeared to be related to curricular modifications and revised teaching practices.

Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The sixth-grade foreign language students at this suburban junior high school demonstrate a lack of interest and poor motivation, as evidenced by teacher observation and surveys given to students and teachers from the previous year.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting

This junior high school is comprised of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students with a total student population of 585 (303 males and 282 females). The student population is 71.3 percent Caucasian, 2.7 percent Afro-American, 11.1 percent Hispanic, 1.5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.0 percent Native American. Several high schools are fed by the three junior high schools in the district.

The administrative staff includes one principal and two assistant principals; each one taking responsibility for one of the three grade levels. There are 58 staff members; 32 of these are classroom

teachers. The special services staff includes: a school nurse, a speech and language therapist, a psychologist, a social worker, a teacher of behaviorally disturbed (BD) students, an resource person for learning disabled (LD) students, a teacher of LD self-contained students, and a teacher of at-risk students. These special service staff provide assistance for 91 students, 66 formally and 25 informally. All of these students are mainstreamed to some degree.

The majority of the students come from middle income families, with 4.7 percent coming from low income families. There is limited English proficiency in 9.2 percent of the families. The attendance rate at this school is 94.7 percent, with a mobility rate of 13.7 percent, and three chronic truants.

Average class size for sixth grade is 23, which is lower than either district or state sizes. The time scheduled for sixth grade foreign language instruction is less than 25 percent of that allotted to all other core subjects.

The 197 sixth grade students (118 males and 79 females) are divided into eight foreign language classes. The curriculum offers these students an opportunity to sample either Spanish or French during fourth or fifth period. The two forty-five minute periods are

divided into four sections (Appendix A). Half of the period is lunch and the other half alternates study skills with foreign language. Each quarter, the Monday-Wednesday-Friday sections switch with the Tuesday-Thursday sections, so that each section has equal time in both subjects. Ideally, a foreign language program should meet on a daily basis (Muller,1989), and the original district curriculum was developed on that premise. The other two junior high schools in the district follow that design. Because this junior high does not, the students are unable to complete the program. Therefore, the curriculum is ineffective as it presently exists.

Description of Surrounding Community

The school district has a population of 5,770 students who attend eleven elementary schools (K-5) and three junior high schools (6-8). It embraces four separate communities thirty to forty miles northwest of Chicago. This particular school population draws primarily from one of these four communities. Its total population is 53,414. Approximately one-fifth of the population is under 18 years of age; 15 percent is over 65. Ninety-two percent are Caucasian, less than one percent are Afro-American, 0.1 percent are Native American, 4.7 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 6.6

percent are of Hispanic origin.

The mean household income for Caucasians is $47,826; $29,833 for Afro-Americans; $86,639 for Native Americans; $49,209 for Asian or Pacific Islanders; $44,819 for Hispanic origin; and, $43,064 for other races. Demographic data indicate that the community is predominantly middle class Caucasian.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

In today's rapidly changing world, the need for men and women who have multi-language proficiency is increasing dramatically. "...many business and political leaders recognize that foreign-language programs are crucial to America's continuing competitiveness in the global economy,..." (Watkins,1988 p.A15). Recent national studies have influenced federal, state, and local educational policy makers (Willetts and Short,1990). On a national level, increased funds have been made available for modern language programs. The Joint National Committee for Languages states that during the late 1980's Congress increased the number of these programs by 14 percent (Watkins,1988).

State trends in this area indicate more foreign language

requirements for high school graduation, and an increased number of programs being implemented in elementary and middle schools. Louisiana, New York and North Carolina have state mandates for foreign language education beginning, in some states, as early as kindergarten (Draper,1989).

Furthermore, Draper (1989) attests that modern language requirements for college and university admission have regained the previous levels of importance. According to the Modern Language Association, there has been an increase of 8.5 percent in college registration for foreign languages since the early 1980's (Watkins,1988). With expanded global and economic awareness, certain languages have had substantial increase in registration. Between 1983 and 1986, Japanese and Chinese language registration increased by 45.4 percent and 28.2 percent, respectively (Watkins,1988).

In spite of all the above-mentioned advances, the value placed on foreign language education and multi-language proficiency in our country remains less important than in many other economically competitive countries. Daniel Shanahan (1989 p.A40), head of the Program in English Studies at the Monterrey Institute of

International Studies, writes:

> It is nothing less than criminal for a country so admittedly language poor and so strapped for competitive advantage in the international marketplace to be adopting myopic and regressive language laws that reinforce the naive monolingual bias that threatens to isolate and weaken it. Yet it is also understandable that Americans want clarity and perhaps a degree of reassurance in our increasingly volatile and shifting ethnic and linguistic environment.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DEFINITION AND EVIDENCE

Problem Background

In July 1986, a sixth-grade foreign language curriculum was designed by the district foreign language teachers based on a summer seminar at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This curriculum was devised for a 20 minute class period five days a week. The program would be offered to students at the sixth-grade reading level and above. Consequently, the designated academic level helped shape the development of resulting curriculum.

For scheduling and administrative reasons, the sixth-grade program at the targetted junior high school was limited to 20 minutes every other day the first year. The foreign language staff had hoped that eventually scheduling and administration would allow for a change to every-day instruction. But, because of other curriculum demands on the sixth-grade program, the administration was unable to make such a change, and plans no such change in the

future.

Initially, the foreign language staff attempted to complete as much of the curriculum as possible. After the first year, some units were shortened and others eliminated. Efforts continued through the subsequent years to modify the program. In 1991, eliminating tracking of students and implementing heterogeneous grouping became important goals at this junior high school. The entire foreign language program was opened up to include all students. As a result, additional adjustments to the sixth-grade program were needed. These curriculum and grouping issues were never addressed at the school or district level.

As evidenced by teacher observations and discussion between foreign language staff members, students were demonstrating a lack of interest and poor motivation in regard to the present sixth grade curriculum. In response to these discussions and observations, the foreign language staff met for the purpose of discussing possible solutions. It was decided that new second language teaching methods be explored to increase student interest and motivation. Also, the meeting focused on ways to bring relevance and continuity to the program. The teachers agreed to survey students and other

foreign language teachers in the district, and considered the future probability of designing a program to fit the unique needs of this junior high school student population.

Problem Evidence

A student survey (Appendix E) was administered to two classes totalling 31 seventh-grade Spanish students who had participated in the sixth-grade foreign language program. These two groups were comprised of students from classes of each of the three foreign language teachers the previous year. The purpose of the survey was to discover student attitudes and opinions regarding real-life applicability of the material, the level of confidence upon entering foreign language the following year, the level of interest in what was taught, the degree of difficulty of the program, and the preference for teaching methods, materials and activities. Table 1, presented on the following page, displays the results of the first five questions, which were formatted using a Likert scale. The information was tabulated in percentages.

Table 1

Survey of Opinions (Part 1) Regarding the Sixth-Grade Foreign Language Program Administered to Two Classes the Following Year September 1993

	NOT VERY	SOMEWHAT	VERY
Real-Life	45%	48%	7%
Confidence	3%	65%	32%
Continuity	23%	61%	16%
Interest	13%	39%	48%
Difficulty	58%	39%	3%

As Table 1 indicates, when students were asked how useful what they learned was for real-life situations, the majority of the responses was divided equally between "not very" and "somewhat". Only seven percent felt that the material had real-life applicability. However, the responses to the second question reveal that 98 percent of the students felt confident going into the following year of foreign language based on that sixth-grade experience. This may indicate that students at the junior high level see little correlation between the applicability of information learned and their feelings about future performance. Although more than 60 percent of the students saw some connection between curriculum topics, nearly one-quarter felt that the units had no relation to each other. Based

on the above data, the need for curriculum revision seems evident.

Responses to the fourth question concerning the level of interest in the program showed the following: 48 percent of those surveyed indicated a high interest in what they learned; the remaining 52 percent was divided between "not very" and "somewhat". This lack of interest may have come from those students whose needs were not addressed by the original curriculum, or it may be that the lack of varied teaching techniques were excluding certain student learning styles. Regardless of the reason, the need to raise the students' interest level exists. Similar conclusions could be drawn from the answers to the fifth question: 42 percent of the students indicated that the classes were somewhat or very difficult. Since the original program was designed for students who achieved at or above grade-level proficiency in reading, these same materials might be too difficult for a heterogeneous population. The figure on the next page illustrates these data.

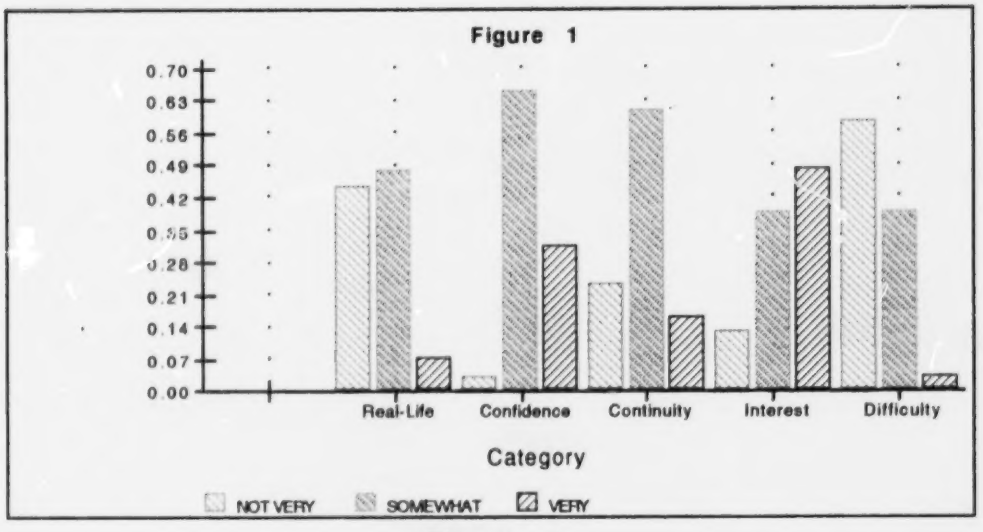

Figure 1
Student Responses to Survey

Table 2 presents the results of the remainder of the student survey. The format of question six asked students to respond to seven learning activities from the sixth-grade program. The students were directed to circle the two activities they enjoyed the most, and to underline the two they liked the least. A line was provided for comments regarding these activities. Question seven requested students to list two other activities they would like to have included in the foreign language program.

Table 2

Survey of Opinions (Part 2) Regarding the Sixth-Grade Foreign Language Program Administered to Two Classes the Following Year September 1993

	Most	Least	Total
Worksheets	3	16	19
Music	4	14	18
Coop.Groups	4	7	11
Flash Cards	0	15	15
Coloring	19	4	23
Games	19	0	19
TPR	11	4	15

Most = number of students choosing this as a preferred activity
Least = number of students choosing this as a least-liked activity
Total = number of students responding to this activity

The category receiving the most student response was coloring assignments. The two activities selected as most enjoyable were games and coloring assignments. It is apparent that games and coloring sheets should remain a part of the foreign language program provided they are designed to focus on the material to be learned. In the "least-liked" category, games were never selected; in the "most-liked" category, flash cards were never selected. Worksheets, music and flashcards received a similar number of responses as least-liked items. For these activities to be more enjoyable and maintain their educational value, their appearance and presentation needed significant changes.

Cooperative groups obtained the fewest number of replies, probably because this teaching methodology was in the experimental stages at the end of last year. Perhaps this shows a need for further staff development in the area of cooperative learning. Nearly three times as many students selected TPR as most-liked compared to least-liked. This confirms that the kinesthetic methodology is a valuable part of the curriculum; as it not only produces good results, but is fun. Figure 2 illustrates these data.

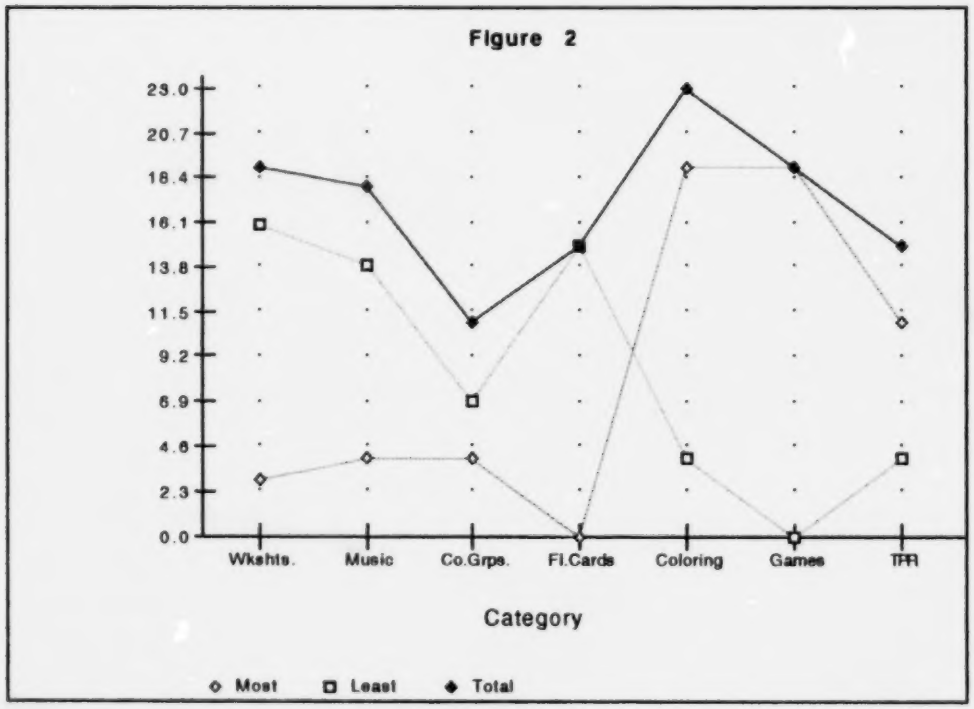

Figure 2
The Number of Responses of Seventh-Grade Students to Each of the Designated Categories

Student survey responses are supported by teacher observation. Teachers reported that students were frequently unprepared for class, and homework was done erratically. Unit lessons were repetitive in design and content, and students were able to predict with regularity what was going to occur in the classroom. Class participation became less spontaneous and students grew less enthusiastic. Inappropriate behavior increased, resulting in lower quality instructional time. These teacher observations indicated that student motivation and interest had declined.

Probable Causes of Problem

As confirmed by the data in Table 1 and Figure 1, three-quarters of the students perceived very little continuity between the instructional units. Lack of interest and motivation among students might be attributed to their perception of this lack of continuity. A majority of the students felt that the curriculum did not have much real-life relevance. This could also explain the low level of interest among students. More than 40 percent of the students expressed concerns about the difficulty of the material. Again, this might have a negative effect on their interest level. In

conclusion, the information obtained from the student surveys supports data collected from sources of literature regarding causation of lack of motivation and low levels of interest.

Two questionnaires documented the attitudes and opinions of the foreign language staff members, one of those questioned staff within the district (Appendix B) and the other interviewed teachers within this school (Appendix C). The questionnaire administered to the five foreign language teachers at the other two district junior high schools revealed 80 percent of the staff felt they would not be able to cover the present curriculum given a 20 minute, every-other-day schedule (Appendix A). All of the staff members agreed the program would require extensive modifying or redesigning. Whether they chose to modify or redesign, their suggestions were similar. For example, all staff would choose to omit some units and select others, based on what would provide continuity to the following year or relevancy for student interest. In addition to modification of the curriculum, the majority favored continued use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology. Comments were made in support of including both traditional and non-traditional teaching styles. Similar responses were given when staff was asked how inclusion of

all sixth graders would impact their foreign language program. Using different learning styles, placing more emphasis on the TPR methods, and not going into as much detail were specifically mentioned.

Response regarding continuity was varied. One teacher was satisfied with the program, another wanted more variety of activities, a third related the need for more relevance of vocabulary, and two did not respond. When asked to speculate on any problems which might arise given this new schedule and total student inclusion, a variety of responses were listed: slower pace, fewer units covered, limited retention of information, decreased student interest level, and larger classes.

The other questionnaire (Appendix C) was administered to the three foreign language staff members at this junior high school. They were asked to assess the foreign language curriculum presently in use. They were requested to address five issues: continuity between the units, the focus/purpose of the curriculum, preparedness for the continuation of the seventh grade foreign language program, relevance and appropriateness of vocabulary and topics for the heterogeneous student population. The teachers

agreed the units were isolated and lacked continuity, the program had no evident focus, and preparation for the following year's foreign language class was minimal. Also, they felt the curriculum lacked relevance and the material was inappropriate for the varied ability levels.

Responses to the next question revealed that the present sixth-grade foreign language schedule (Appendix A) restricted implementation of the presently-designed curriculum. The original units were too long and involved for the time available.

The staff members concurred that all students could benefit from a foreign language program; it could improve self-esteem and eliminate feelings of exclusion. Although the pace would need to slow down, and it might be more difficult teaching to dif'erent ability levels, all agreed the benefits outweighed the disadvantages.

Regarding curriculum modification, teachers unanimously felt that a program resulting from simple alterations to the present plan, would be insufficient. The preferred route was "redesigning" the program to include a variety of teaching styles, an assortment of games and music, mini-units with cultural focus, more personalized vocabulary, a selection of activities for all the academic levels, and

quizzes written to fit the student needs.

Staff observations and subsequent conversations during the 1992-1993 school year provided additional data regarding probable causes of the problem. It was agreed that the sixth-grade foreign language schedule was in conflict with the curriculum as designed. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of this school's student population clashed with the program designed for students at or above sixth-grade reading level. Because the staff recognized that changing these two aspects was not possible, other areas of probable cause were explored. Lack of interest and poor motivation were perceived to be a result of an inadequate curriculum; that is, absence of real-life applicability, impersonal vocabulary, little continuity of units, and an insufficient variety of teaching methologies. In conjunction with the above, the program required a new focus: student heterogeneity.

Probable cause data from the literature was classified into inadequacies pertaining to teaching methods, curriculum design, and scheduling factors. The traditional, teacher-centered method of instruction was mentioned by several authorities as a negative influence in learning a second language. Experts acknowledged

anxiety as a major threat to the learning environment because it narrowed perceptions thus impairing learning. (R. Hawley and I. Hawley,1981). Asher (1982) stated that less than five percent of students could handle the stress of learning a foreign language in a classroom using the traditional teaching methology. In this type of formal, teacher-centered situation, students felt pressured to perform. Kagan (1991) cited research revealing that in most classrooms teachers did about 80 percent of the talking, allowing students very little time for participation. According to R. Hawley and I. Hawley (1981), when students felt powerless their motivation was low. The traditional foreign language classroom did not empower students; it provided the teacher with complete control.

Also, Willetts and Short (1990) maintained that students lost motivation and interest when foreign language classes did not meet on a daily basis. Having classes on a less frequent basis was detrimental to learning. Furthermore, a curriculum deficient in real-life content would result in decreased interest. (Krashen and Terrell,1983)

> When a "unit" of curriculum is presented in such a way that students see no relation between it and their world picture, the "unit" will appear to be without personal meaning, and the chances that it will become internalized and integrated are small (R. Hawley and I. Hawley,1981, p.16).

In addition, appropriate content without supporting continuity would compound the problem. The curriculum was also ineffective when suitable programs reflecting the needs, ability levels, and interests of the students were not offered (Short and Willetts, 1991). Therefore, a program designed for a homogeneous group would not be as effective when used with a heterogeneous student population. Kagan (1991, p.2:2) further supported this idea in the statement below:

> Old teaching methods which assume a single language, and homogeneity of proficiencies and learning styles within a classroom are increasingly inadequate and inappropriate.

It was apparent from expert testimony that traditional teaching methods, inappropriate curriculum and ineffective scheduling were detrimental to the learning process.

The following is a summary of the probable causes for the problem. This information was obtained from the site and from professional literature.

1. district-designed curriculum was too extensive for the time allotted at this site,
2. sixth-grade program would not allow for every-day instruction,
3. curriculum content did not have real-life application,
4. units lacked a natural continuity,
5. program did not address the needs of a heterogeneous student population,
6. teaching methods were inappropriate for program objectives.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Analysis of probable cause data suggested that causes for student lack of interest and poor motivation were directly related to the fact that the content lacked real-life application, the units were disconnected and needed continuity, the material was not appropriate for all academic levels, and the foreign language class schedule was in itself a factor. In addition to these data, research literature suggested that a formal, more traditional approach to foreign language instruction could be stress-inducing. Materials with an inappropriate degree of difficulty lessened student interest. When students felt powerless in class, their motivation was low. And, when classes did not meet on a daily basis and subject matter lacked real-life relevancy, student attention levels declined.

Based on the above probable cause data, a literature search for

solution strategies was developed. A series of questions related to the following topics: student behavior, teaching strategies, and curriculum design, should be addressed.

Questions concerning student behavior focus on the areas of interest and motivation: 1. Which activities affect student interest and motivation in a positive way? 2. What factors build student self-confidence when learning a second language? 3. What will influence students to take more responsibility for their education?

Questions about teaching strategies cover: 1. What strategies should foreign language teachers use to effectively instill positive student attitudes? 2. How can several teaching strategies be used concurrently? 3. In what ways can teachers affect student motivation?

Following is a list of questions pertaining to curriculum design: 1. What strategies lend themselves to real-life application? 2. How can the continuity of units be achieved? 3. Which activities will most effectively fulfill the needs of a heterogeneous group of students?

Motivation, foreign language instruction, middle school/junior high education, cooperative learning, the TPR method, and authentic

assessment were categories suggested by the above-mentioned questions.

To increase interest and motivation, students should feel they share control of the learning process. According to R. Hawley and I. Hawley (1981, p.3):

> The drive to be in charge of oneself is a guiding principle which we can use in understanding student attitudes toward schoolwork and in structuring the curriculum. The manner in which the procedures we use in teaching do or do not satisfy this basic drive will have much to do with a student's motivation toward academic achievement.

In support of the above, Glasser (1990) strongly suggested that students work in cooperative groups to satisfy their needs of power and belonging. Satisfaction of these inherent needs helped to build self-confidence in students. In addition, he stated that students should have more input in the decision-making in the classroom, and as a reward for work well done, they should be encouraged to plan activities. "The more students are involved in shaping their learning environment, the more investment they will have in the learning situation" (R. Hawley and I. Hawley, 1981, p.35).

One strategy used by foreign language teachers that promoted

high student interest and involvement was the TPR method as developed by James Asher. His theory is based on a powerful teaching style, kinesthetics, which uses the student's muscular response system. There are three elements in this theory: 1. rapid, non-stop action, 2. unusual, unexpected commands that are often silly, and 3. an immediate sense of understanding of the second language (1983).

A second strategy, cooperative learning, demonstrated success in influencing positive student attitudes. Ford (1991) defined cooperative learning as a method for improving the academic performance of students through group work. Ford (1991) cited Long and Porter, who wrote that the relaxed classroom atmosphere of cooperative grouping allowed for more positive student attitudes toward second language learning. The following advantages of cooperative learning in a foreign language classroom have been cited: it promoted communication skills, higher level thinking skills and social skills (Kagan,1991); also, it resulted in less stress from the "audience effect" because students did not have to speak in front of a large group, and yet they had more opportunities to speak in their small groups (Ford,1991, p.51); and finally, it increased

motivation as it was fun (Julkunen,1990).

Even though there was no evidence to indicate that these two strategies were compatible, no literature was uncovered to the contrary. These two methodologies shared the belief that without student interest and motivation, learning a second language was obstructed. Both were designed to actively involve students and provide a positive learning environment. There was some evidence supporting the implementation of more than one teaching methodology in a given curriculum. Through research Doggett (1986) found that many teachers experienced success combining several approaches to foreign language instruction in their classrooms.

Ford (1991) cited Kagan, McGroarty, and Long and Porter regarding the natural environment created by cooperative learning. A starting point for communication among students was the realism of a small group setting allowing them more opportunity to speak and interact. In addition, the structure of the language needed to be realistic. Asher (1983) based his theory of second language learning on his studies of Piaget who asserted that infants learned their language through parent commands. So, Asher proposed that students could learn a foreign language in the same manner, in

essence as an infant would. Commands such as stand, sit, walk to the board, touch your nose, etc. would be examples of this method. Asher found the imperative tense was the easiest to use and the most fun for students; he called it the "golden tense" (1983, p.158).

R. Hawley and I. Hawley (1981) echoed the importance of subject matter having personal meaning for the student. Curriculum units should be presented in such a way that they established and pursued the information which students already knew. Students would find classroom activities meaningful only if the context in which they were practiced was meaningful. One avenue for selecting reality-based information for foreign language classes would be collecting realia. Specimens or artifacts, such as magazines or souvenirs, from a particular culture would be excellent motivation devices for student learning. An explicit summation of the importance of using real-life situations and materials in the foreign language classroom, was provided by a report from the Alaska State Department of Education (1985, pp.19-20):

> Relating the language experience to the children's immediate "world context" will be crucial. For that age group (the young learner) TPR, the Total Physical Response approach (Asher) will be of greater significance and benefit than for any other age group of learners. Singing and story telling will become

> attractive, regular activities. ...good materials are available ... : records or cassettes, story books, coloring books, ... In fact, anything the teacher or children can show, demonstrate or act out in class can be made to work. Any object, person, action or idea can become a focal point of learning, practicing, and meaningful communication.

Complementing the importance of real-life applicability to curriculum content was the significant advantage of heterogeneous grouping. Kagan (1991) said that the heterogeneous group in the class became a positive example of how people could deal with the demographic and economic changes. Dishon and O'Leary (1984) corroborated this belief stating that heterogeneity in the classroom mirrored the real world; that students learned more academically and socially when the members of the group were not homogeneous. The Alaska Department of Education (1985) advocated heterogeneous groups in the foreign language classroom, not only because they benefitted all students, but also because their research indicated that the academically-deficient students perhaps benefitted even more than the stronger ones. For those reasons, the classroom became a small, self-contained environment where students learned how to live and get along in the real world.

A summary of the literature which addressed the questions related to curriculum design suggested the following strategies:

1. Traditional foreign language teaching methods should be de-emphasized.
2. Cooperative learning should be employed in the classroom.
3. The TPR approach should be included.
4. Lessons involving real-life situations and materials should be designed.
5. A continuity between the units should be established.
6. The program should fit the needs of a heterogeneous group.

Project Outcomes

The terminal objective of this problem was related to the student and teacher surveys presented in Chapter Two. Student surveys showed that there was a lack of interest and poor motivation among the majority of those in the sixth-grade foreign language program. Teacher surveys indicated a similar discrepancy. In the final part of Chapter Two, probable cause data suggested the need to improve teaching methods and to redevelop the curriculum. A review of the literature in the earlier part of this chapter substantiated the necessity for designing a program relevant to the particular needs of the school system. It also supported the need for teaching strategies that address interest and motivation. Therefore:

As a result of implementing a new curriculum which includes cooperative learning and the Total Physical Response method during the month of September 1993 to December 1993, the sixth grade foreign language students at this suburban junior high will increase interest and motivation, as measured by teacher observation and by both teacher and student surveys.

In order to achieve the terminal objectives, the following process objectives outlined the significant strategies for proceeding toward resolution of the problem.

1. As a result of the curriculum designed and implemented during the summer of 1993 and extending through January 1994, the sixth grade foreign language classes will include an increased amount and a greater variety of cooperative group activities specifically related to increasing language proficiency.

2. As a result of inservice training and planning sessions, teacher/researchers and a colleague will become familiar with the curriculum, its unit lesson plans and materials, and develop strategies for implementation.

3. As a result of the implementation of cooperative learning strategies, students will gain an awareness and understanding of the social skills needed to work successfully in a group, and apply those skills to foreign language achievement.

4. As a result of the continued development of the TPR activities combined with cooperative learning methodology, the foreign language curriculum will become more relevant to the students.

Project Solution Components

The major element of the solution strategy to decrease

student lack of interest and poor motivation involved designing a curriculum to include the following: a variety of teaching styles -- including cooperative learning and TPR, lessons mirroring real-life situations, materials appropriate to the needs of the heterogeneous classes, and continuity between the units designed.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description of Problem Resolution Activities

The action plan is designed to address four major solution components: curriculum redevelopment, staff in-service, student training, and implementation of the program.

The curriculum redevelopment phase of the plan will begin in the summer of 1993 with a committee of three foreign language teachers (two researchers and a colleague). Based on on-going teacher observations and discussions at the end of the previous year, a sixth-grade foreign language program will be designed and implemented in the Fall of 1993.

Staff in-service will begin in late August 1993 and continue throughout the year. The purpose of this staff development component is three-fold: first, an on-going discussion and inspection of the curriculum content; second, a review of the TPR teaching

techniques and clarification of cooperative learning methods; and third, a continued observation of the levels of interest and motivation of the students.

The first week of school, students will be trained in the social skills necessary for cooperative grouping. At the completion of this period of instruction, implementation of the new curriculum will begin. The improvements expected are higher levels of interest and increased motivation as a result of more reality-based activities, curricular continuity, and a program intended for a heterogeneous group.

The plan for implementing this curriculum is presented below chronologically in outline form with allowances for overlapping of methodologies.

1. Provide for foreign language curriculum redevelopment.
    A. Who: The three foreign language staff members will design the program
    B. What: They will create a sixth-grade foreign language curriculum.
    C. When: This will occur during the summer of 1993.
    D. Where: Work will take place at a staff member's home

site.

E. How: Using resources collected during the past year, as well as staff expertise, they will cooperatively complete the task.

F. Why: The finished product will be used as a program to be implemented by the staff during the school year, thus insuring program standardization for all students.

2. Continue observation of program implementation.

A. Who: The three foreign language teachers will meet for the purpose of discussing student progress.

B. What: Observation of the new curriculum and its direction will be documented and examined.

C. When: The group will meet informally twice a month at times mutually agreed upon.

D. Where: Meetings will take place at the junior high school.

E. How: Log entries and journals of observations by teachers will serve as material for discussion.

F. Why: These discussions will provide information

pertaining to student interest and motivation, and evaluation of curriculum effectiveness.

3. Provide students with training in the social skills needed for cooperative learning.

   A. Who: The three foreign language teachers will be responsible for the instruction.

   B. What: Cooperative learning techniques will be explained and practiced until proficiency is achieved.

   C. When: This training will begin as soon as possible following the onset of school (Fall, 1993). Reinforcement of the basics will continue when needed.

   D. How: An introductory unit will be designed to teach the social skills as well as introduce vocabulary in the target language. As the unit progresses, one specific activity will serve as a unifying element for the groups. In the future, collection of observational data will provide staff with input to possible modifications.

E. Why: The skills needed in cooperative grouping are essential to the designed program. They enable the students to work together effectively, and ultimately to achieve increased interest and motivation for learning a foreign language.

4. Implement the new program through increased use of the TPR methods and cooperative learning.

   A. Who: The foreign language staff will accomplish this step.

   B. What: Lesson plans and unit materials will provide the basics for classroom instruction.

   C. When: This will take place during the 1993-1994 school year.

   D. How: Following the directions provided in the lesson plans, the foreign language teachers will proceed through the units, keeping journal notation on the effectiveness of the program.

   E. Why: The main goal of the curriculum is to expand the level of interest in and motivation for learning a foreign language. Another objective will be the

improved academic achievement and a smooth transition to the next learning level.

Methods of Assessment

Several data collection methods will be used in order to assess the effectiveness of the new program. Changes in student attitudes will be measured through the use of a survey. This will be administered to the target group at the end of January 1994; and the results will be compared to those recorded in the Fall of 1993. To complete this study and formulate more accurate results, another survey will be administered at the end of the school year.

The levels of interest and motivation will be recorded in journal entries based on observation by staff throughout the school year. The issues of content relevancy and continuity will be noted. In addition, the staff will examine the appropriateness of the curriculum for heterogeneous grouping.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROCESS

Implementation History

The terminal objectives addressed the issues of lack of interest and poor motivation of the sixth-grade foreign language students, as revealed in a student survey and teacher observations. In addition, the curriculum required more time than the schedule permitted, indicating a need for program changes. Therefore, the terminal objectives stated:

> As a result of implementing a new curriculum which includes cooperative learning and the Total Physical Response method during the month of September 1993 to December 1993, the sixth grade foreign language students at this suburban junior high will increase interest and motivation, as measured by teacher observation and by both teacher and student surveys.

The two teacher-researchers and a colleague of this junior high school met in the summer of 1993 for the purpose of evaluating the present sixth-grade curriculum and making program changes. Discussions centered around the teachers' dissatisfaction with the

current curriculum and their observation of students' lack of enthusiasm in their classes. Through a cooperative and thoughtful process, they analyzed the various components of the program. Utilizing their expertise and their combined resource materials, they redeveloped the curriculum. A standardized sixth-grade foreign language curriculum was finalized and reproduced for this staff for implementation in the fall of 1993.

The curriculum had two elements: an initial and on-going effort to provide students with training in the social skills needed for cooperative learning, and the implementation of the new units as designed. The foreign language teachers would be responsible for the introduction of cooperative learning techniques. The cooperative group element of the new curriculum was essential to the success of the program. Positive interaction with other students was one of the keys to increased interest and motivation in learning the language.

A unit designed especially for cooperative groups was the preparative lesson. It introduced students to vocabulary in the target language, in addition to providing them with a group-unifying activity. Based on conversations with former students, the topic of

animals was chosen for its high interest. The underlying intent was to provide an exciting subject to facilitate teaching the social skills needed to work in groups. There were five 20-minute classes in this unit. Students worked enthusiastically and cooperatively. Group work was displayed in the classroom. The unit objectives were accomplished.

Subsequent units included a variety of cooperative group activities to reinforce the social skills. Within each unit, one specific activity served as a unifying element for the groups. For example, in the unit on action commands, a group game was designed to help the students practice the vocabulary orally, as well as encourage team work. These activities afforded students the opportunity to actively use the language in a natural setting, in small peer groups. Competition was de-emphasized.

Because team cooperation was highly valued, teachers were encouraged to take time to reteach the social skills when necessary. A log was kept by the teacher to monitor individual effort within each group. A system of points and zeros was used to assess on-task performance and evaluate group effectiveness; one point for on-task behavior, a zero for off-task behavior. This was for teacher

information only; no rewards or consequences were a direct result of the accumulation of points. The log provided feedback to facilitate future group formation and to support the teacher when holding conferences with students.

The second component of the program was the redeveloped curricular units. It covered approximately two quarters of instructional time. Unit lesson plans and the resource materials provided the basis for the classes. Some units had several sections to include related topics. Based on former student suggestions, special units were designed to celebrate two holidays. The content of the units focused on real-life applicability and personalization of the material. The pace of instruction was determined by the needs of the students as evidenced by teacher observation. A relaxed and stress-free atmosphere was a primary goal of the program.

Individual and group activities, T.P.R., music and songs were the basic components of the program. Inclusion of one group activity and some T.P.R. techniques provided the base for each unit after the preparatory lessons. Once the students had become comfortable with the cooperative group techniques in the introductory lessons, the next unit focused on training students in the T.P.R. methodology.

This provided a base for future T.P.R. instruction, allowing for frequent review and inviting the addition of new commands to complement each unit's vocabulary.

Individual activities, music and songs were integrated into a lesson whenever possible. The intention was to incorporate as great a variety of techniques as possible to stimulate interest. Individual activities, such as vocabulary bingo, exercised the students' ability to listen and comprehend, and provided a measure of individual success in contrast to their group accomplishments. Music and songs were used for two reasons: to introduce a lesson with a catchy tune to inspire interest, and to provide additional practice in a relaxed manner once vocabulary had been internalized. All class activities focused on peaking student interest, providing motivation to complete assignments, learn vocabulary, and achieve success on assessments.

Students were assessed on the quality of their class work and their quiz scores. Project assessment was based on student ability to follow directions, apply learned information, and participate actively. A quiz was given at the conclusion of each unit, testing the student's ability to understand the spoken language and to

recognize written vocabulary. No emphasis was placed on spelling or writing, which is consistent with the T.P.R. methodology. Quizzes were short and concise for two reasons: the time constraints of the class, and more importantly, the success factor. Facilitating academic success helped build confidence and inspired students to continue achieving.

Observational data provided the staff with information regarding possible changes, modifications, or additions to the lessons. The three foreign language teachers met informally at least twice a month for the purpose of discussing the merits of the new program. These meetings took place at the targetted junior high school. Discussions centered around the pace and duration of each unit, student response to the lessons, appropriateness of the content, effectiveness of the activities and games, design and format of the assessments, the success of T.P.R. techniques and cooperative learning, and summer 1994 agenda for program enhancement. One intent of the redesigned program was to maintain student interest with shorter units, moving through the material quickly. Staff agreed that this end was accomplished as log entries and observational data revealed no indication of student

apathy concerning length of the lessons. In effect, student response to the new program was positive. Another intent was to give students vocabulary more related to themselves and their world at an earlier time in the curriculum. For example, the face and body parts unit was shortened and moved toward the beginning of the program. Staff noticed increased spontaneity and enthusiasm when the students were using the vocabulary with each other. Games and activities were utilized whenever possible due to their extremely high rating among the children. As predicted, they were highly successful and motivational. Students frequently requested cooperative group games.

Assessments were non-threatening in design. Pictures and graphics, previously introduced in the units, were often included in the quizzes. The format was consistent, beginning with listening comprehension and concluding with reading proficiency; spelling and writing skills were not tested. Student success was relatively guaranteed with these short, simple quizzes.

The novelty of T.P.R. insured interest and active participation among the students. In later units, when cooperative group activities became the focus, teachers noticed that the use of T.P.R.

decreased due to lack of appropriate action vocabulary. Cooperative learning skills were instilled in the preparatory lesson, providing a necessary base for future units. Observational analysis confirmed the value of this educational process. However, when the need to reteach one or more of the social skills occurred, the time constraints forced the teacher to choose between continuing with the lesson as planned, or stopping to reteach that skill.

The informal foreign language staff meetings, combined with the log and other observational data, confirmed the need for summer work in the following areas: discuss modifications to the present program, and write the units needed to complete the curriculum, based on the findings of this action research.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

To assess the efficiency of the planned curriculum, sixth-grade foreign language students were surveyed (Appendix E) in February, 1994. The new program was implemented beginning in September, 1993. The purpose of the survey was to discover student attitudes and opinions regarding real-life applicability of the material, the level of confidence concerning their performance in foreign language next year, the level of interest in what was taught,

the degree of difficulty of the program and the preference for teaching methods, materials and activities. This survey was administered to four sixth-grade foreign language classes totalling 80 students. The results of the survey are presented in Tables 3 and 4, and Figures 3 and 4. Table 3 presents the results of the first five questions which were formatted using a Likert scale; information was tabulated in percentages.

Table 3
Survey of Opinions (Part 1) Regarding the Sixth-Grade Foreign Language Program Administered to Four Classes February 1994

	NOT VERY	SOMEWHAT	VERY
Real-Life	18%	60%	22%
Confidence	5%	29%	66%
Continuity	12%	38%	50%
Interest	12%	45%	43%
Difficulty	49%	41%	10%

As Table 3 indicates, when students were asked how useful what they learned was for real-life situations, more than half of them chose "somewhat". The remainder was divided almost equally between "very" and "not very". Comparing this information to the data from the initial student survey, notable improvement had been

achieved in this area. The high level of confidence recorded in the first survey was duplicated in the second. Nearly 90 percent of those surveyed this year recognized a connection between curriculum topics -- a significant increase over last year. In the above areas, the new curriculum appears to have accomplished its objectives.

Twelve percent of the students were "not very" interested in the new curriculum, which is almost the same as the thirteen percent in the previous program. In addition, five percent fewer students responded "very" interested. Apparently the revised program did not impact upon this area. With regard to the difficulty assessment, more than three times as many students rated the curriculum this year as "very" hard. Since there are fewer unsatisfactory and failing grades this year, it is difficult to rationalize such a high response in this category. One possible explanation is that the survey was given within two days of a quiz on the numbers unit. Even before the survey was given, staff had concluded that the assessment needed revision with regard to its level of difficulty. The students may have been influenced by this experience. Figure 3 illustrates these data.

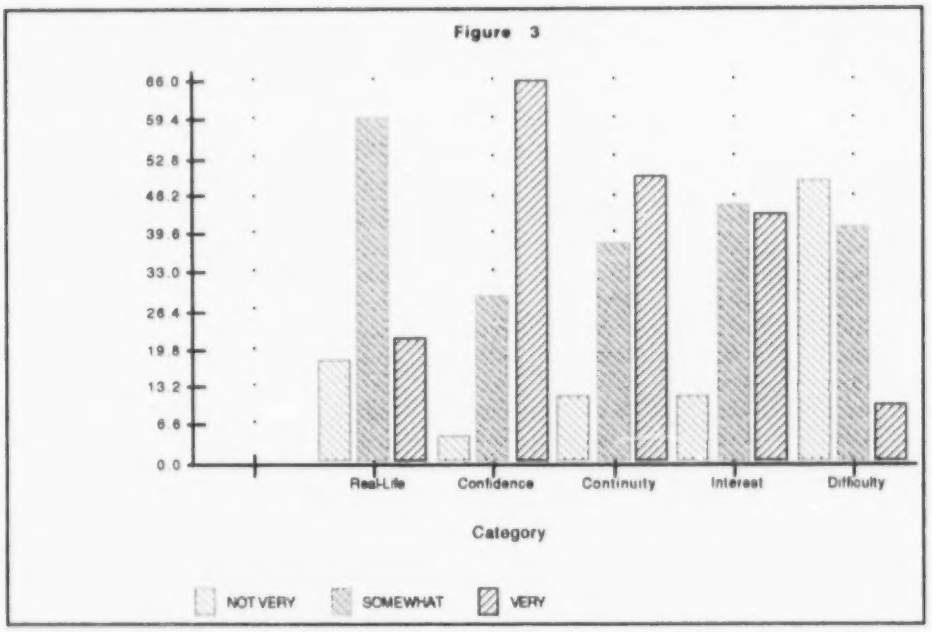

Figure 3
Student Responses to Survey

Table 4 presents the results of the remainder of Student Survey 2. The format of question six asked students to respond to five learning activities from the sixth-grade program. Flash cards and worksheets, two activities listed in the first survey, were not a part of the new curriculum. The students were directed to circle the two they enjoyed the most, and to underline the two they liked the least. Question seven requested students to list two other activities they would like to have included in the foreign language program. The comment line in the first survey was eliminated as few students made use of it.

Table 4
Survey of Opinions (Part 2) Regarding the Sixth-Grade Foreign Language Program Administered to Four Classes this Year
February 1994

	Most	Least	Total
TPR	16	29	45
Music	10	45	55
Coop. Groups	29	27	56
Class Games	41	13	54
Coloring	42	24	66

Most = number of students choosing this as a preferred activity
Least = number of students choosing this as a least-liked activity
Total = number of students responding to this activity

Because of the revised curriculum, these five categories need clarification. T.P.R. was a more integral part of each of the units. In the new program at least one song was incorporated into each of the units. The cooperative groups became the core of the program. Games and activities were the focus of each cooperative learning experience. The category of class games was defined as games played by the entire class, such as bingo, not group games. There were fewer coloring activities in the new program, but all of them focused on the material to be learned.

The category receiving the most student response was coloring assignments, as in the first survey. The two activities selected as

most enjoyable were class games and coloring assignments. Group games were their third choice. These three categories together mirrored the results from first survey, confirming their popularity. The most negative responses in the first survey were to cooperative groups. The positive responses to them in the new program may be a result of the staff development. Music and T.P.R. received the fewest selections as "most liked". This may indicate a need for further development of these two facets of the foreign language program. Figure 4 illustrates these data.

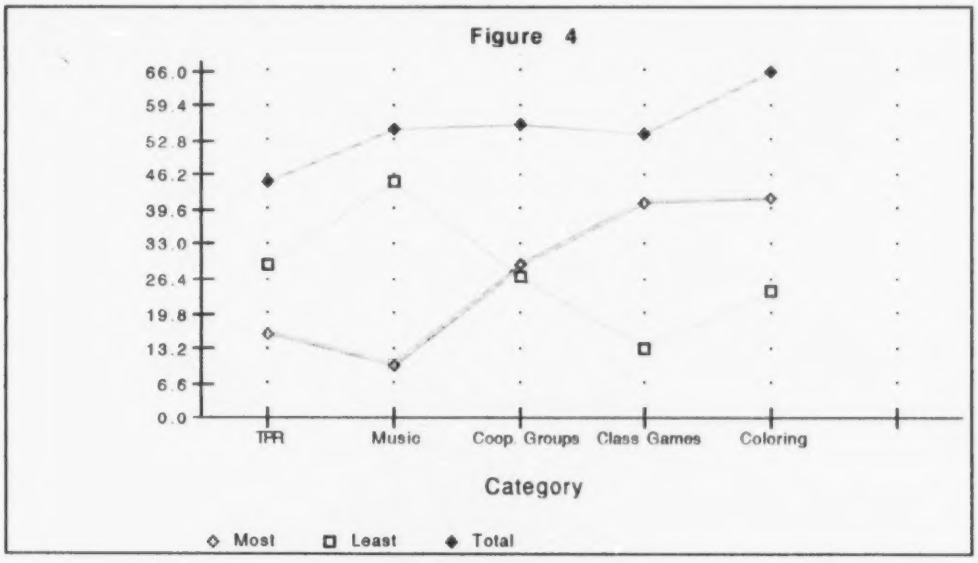

Figure 4
The Number of Responses of Sixth-Grade Students to Each of the Designated Categories

Reflections and Conclusions

The action plan increased student interest and improved motivation for learning a foreign language. Students became proficient in the techniques of cooperative learning and T.P.R. Curriculum revision and staff development were responsible for achieving this goal.

A major part of the curriculum revision was the participation and involvement of the three foreign language staff members (two researchers and a colleague) who would implement the newly-designed program in the fall. Once the objectives had been established, the staff began content revision with these goals in mind. Since the need for change was mutually agreed upon, as well as the intended design of the new curriculum, there were optimum working conditions. Support was provided through attendance at related workshops and institute days. The on-going role of the researchers was to facilitate an atmosphere of mutual sharing with the other staff member.

Information about the revised curriculum was shared with district staff and administrators at the winter institute. At the school site, the principal and his assistants were kept informed

during the year about the progress of the new program. Although not actively involved, they were supportive. There was no apparent opposition to the new curriculum, which might have hindered its implementation.

Chapter 6

DECISIONS ON THE FUTURE

The Solution Strategy

The results from the student survey and accompanying teacher observation indicate that the program should be continued. A need for some modification has been noted. After the changes are in place, the remaining units should be designed with these modifications in mind. Time has been allocated during the summer of 1994 to complete the program. Because the curriculum was specifically designed for this school's unique schedule, it would not likely be adaptable to other junior high schools in the district, or to those outside the district. However, some foreign language teachers within the district have expressed an interest in specific activities and assessments from the program. These will be made available to them upon request.

Recommendations

The program's focus on cooperative groups has had a positive

impact on the curriculum. There was increased student interaction, the group setting was less stressful, and communication in the target language reflected real-life situations. Because of its success, it will remain an integral part of the program. Among the minor modifications needed are clarifications of the directions for some of the group games. Also, there is a desire to incorporate more group activities whenever possible. Due to the popularity of coloring, an effort will be made to create cooperative group coloring activities, while retaining individual ones. Since the lack of enthusiasm regarding music and songs may be due to student self-consciousness, an attempt will be made to develop cooperative group related musical activities.

The other focus of the foreign language curriculum was T.P.R. The introductory T.P.R. unit was positive and effective. However, the vocabulary chosen for subsequent units was ineffective as a T.P.R. base. New vocabulary will be incorporated into a majority of the units. Because body movement is an essential part of T.P.R., lessons combining music and action will be developed. Development of T.P.R.-based games will be another summer objective. A T.P.R. coloring activity and accompanying lesson plan will be designed for

the unit on shapes, colors and numbers.

Student recommendations were collected from the second student survey. As a result, an attempt will be made to obtain appropriate videos on selected topics relating to the units. Since students expressed an interest in learning about the culture through craft projects, these areas will be discussed with the school art teacher and the learning center resource person. Vocabulary pertaining to getting along in a foreign country, asking and answering basic questions about how to get somewhere, how to order food, how to talk on the phone, etc. were additional student suggestions. Although it would be impossible to include all of these ideas, an attempt will be made to satisfy some of these requests.

The action research confirmed that student interest and motivation in learning a foreign language could be enhanced through the development of a program that integrated teaching methodologies. The data supported the merits of developing a curriulum that personalized content and vocabulary. In addition, the research validated the need for a less stressful environment when students are beginning a foreign language. Also, it reaffirmed the importance of staff development as a continuing support for an

effective program. This could not be successfully accomplished without the dedication of those people who recognize that a problem exists, have the desire and the expertise to resolve it, and are willing to do what is necessary to accomplish their goal.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Schedule of Sixth-Grade Foreign Language Classes
Fall 1994

Period	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.
4 A	X	X	X	X	X
4 B	Sp. Sp.	Sp. Fr.	Sp. Sp.	Sp. Fr.	Sp. Sp.
5 A	Sp. Sp.	Sp. Fr.	Sp. Sp.	Sp. Fr.	Sp. Sp.
5 B	X	X	X	X	X

Length of Period = 20 minutes
Sp. = Spanish Fr. = French

Appendix B

SURVEY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THE OTHER TWO DISTRICT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Questionnaire

1. If your 6th grade foreign language schedule changed from 20 minutes Monday through Friday to 20 minutes every other day...

A. Could you cover the present curriculum? Ô yes Ô possibly Ô no

B. If not, would you **modify** or **redesign** the program? (circle one)

C. If you would **modify** - explain what you would do and the time you would need to make the modifications.

_____

_____

_____

D. If you would **redesign** - explain what you would do and the time you would need to create the new program.

_____

_____

_____

E. Would you change your teaching methods? If so, how? Would you use TPR exclusively? Explain. _____

_____

_____

2. In addition to the above schedule change, your classes will now include **all** of the sixth graders. Would you change any of the above answers with that in mind?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

3. To what degree are you satisfied with the continuity of the present sixth grade curriculum? Briefly mention any changes you might desire.

4. Speculate on any problems you might encounter given this new schedule and total student inclusion.

Appendix C

SURVEY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Questionnaire

1. How do you feel about the sixth grade foreign language curriculum as presently used at this school. Specifically, address the issues of:

Continuity of units Focus Preparedness for 7th grade

Relevance Appropriateness for student population

Please be as specific as possible in your answers._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. How does the sixth grade schedule impact the present curriculum?_____

_____

3. List the positives and negatives of including all sixth graders in the program. How do these factors affect the present curriculum?_____

_____

_____

4. Should the present curriculum be modified? If so, how?_____

_____

5. Should the present curriculum be completely redesigned? If so, how?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D

STUDENT SURVEY

Directions: Check (√) the response that best describes your feelings.

1. Think about what you learned in the sixth grade foreign language program last year. How useful was it for real-life situations?
Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

2. How confident do you feel beginning this year's program based on your experience last year?
Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

3. How much do you feel the units were connected to each other in last year's program?
Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

4. How interested were you in what you learned in the foreign language classes in sixth grade?
Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

5. How difficult were your foreign language classes last year?
Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

6. Following are some of last year's class activities:

- worksheets
- music/songs
- cooperative groups
- flash cards
- coloring assignments
- games
- TPR (ex: stand up, turn around)

A. **Circle** the **2** that you enjoyed most.
B. **Underline** the **2** that you enjoyed least.
C. Any comments?_____

7. Name **2** other activities you would like added to the foreign language program to make it more interesting:_____ & _____

Appendix E

STUDENT SURVEY

Directions: Check (√) the response that best describes your feelings.

1. Think about what you are learning in the sixth grade foreign language program. How useful is it for real-life situations?

Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

2. How confident do you feel beginning next year's program based on your experience this year?

Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

3. Do you feel the units in the foreign language program have a logical progression?

Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

4. How interested are you in what you are learning in the foreign language classes in sixth grade?

Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

5. How difficult are your foreign language classes?

Ó NOT VERY Ó SOMEWHAT Ó VERY

6. Following are some of this year's class activities:

- cooperative group activities
- coloring activities
- activities involving total class participation
- music/songs
- TPR (ex: stand up, turn around)

A. **Circle** the **2** that you enjoyed most.
B. **Underline** the **2** that you enjoyed least.

7. Name **2** other activities you would like added to the foreign language program to make it more interesting:

1.
2.